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PRE-BUDGET 2023-24

ACADEMY OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES IN
AUSTRALIA SUBMISSION TO:

THE TREASURY



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The Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia

2023-24 Pre-Budget Submission

The Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia (the Academy) welcomes the opportunity to make recommendations for consideration in the 2023-24 Federal Budget.

The Academy is an independent, not-for-profit organisation that draws on the expertise of over 750 Fellows to provide practical, evidence-based advice to governments, businesses, and the community on important social policy issues.

The social sciences are key to understanding and assisting humanity, society and the institutions that govern our daily lives. Our submission offers five overarching recommendations each with a practical action that the government can implement immediately to support a world-class social science ecosystem and to take coordinated action on two of our nation's biggest challenges, climate change and mental health.

To discuss any matters raised in this submission, please contact Andrea Verdich, Policy Manager on 0438 218 352, or andrea.verdich@socialsciences.org.au.

1. Drive innovation, economic prosperity and social wellbeing through a strategic and coordinated research and innovation ecosystem

Vibrant and effective research and innovation systems are created when whole-of-government methods develop strategy and coordinate across agencies. Australian government investment in research and development is dispersed across more than 200 programs and 13 portfolios. No whole-of-government policy exists for research investment and no central agency oversees or administers research funding.

Without a coordinated national ambition and strategy, the ultimate purpose of research investments lacks clarity, resulting in misaligned priorities. Australia's fragmented approach means that many research investments lack the scale to provide the game-changing breakthroughs that Australia deserves and needs.

While the government has commissioned reviews of the Australian university system, science and research priorities and the Australian Research Council, **the Academy recommends linking these endeavours to a future-focused, whole-of-system re-think of our national research and innovation landscape.** This will ensure it is fit-for-purpose, articulates a national purpose and objectives for research and innovation funding and identifies the most effective structures and arrangements to deliver on these ambitions.

2. Strengthen the social science sector by investing in Social Sciences Week

[Social Sciences Week](#) has grown rapidly in just five years, showing potential to become the key platform for increasing understanding of the social sciences in Australia—showcasing their benefits to the community and the return on government investment.

Established in 2018 by the Academy, in partnership with several social science councils and peak bodies, it is a week-long program of events and activities each September, analogous to National Science Week, that could be easily scaled up with strategic investment.

The aim of Social Sciences Week is to increase understanding and awareness of the insights and contributions of the social sciences and deepen engagement and interaction between social science researchers and schools, teachers and members of the public.

Over five years Social Sciences Week has expanded to comprise almost 100 in-person and online events, a schools program and thousands of participants from across Australia and abroad. The event partners aim to continue growing this annual program with a reach and profile that engages hundreds of thousands of individuals and organisations from the community, business, education, and government sectors.

To support the expansion of the Social Sciences Week program, **the Academy recommends the government prioritise an investment of \$250,000 over two years for:**

- grants to local organisers to support Social Sciences Week events (50-80 x \$500-1,000 grants p.a.; \$100,000 over two years)
- a part-time program coordinator with responsibility for engaging with schools and teachers to increase the scope and reach of the national school's program.

A partnership between the government and the Academy on Social Sciences Week would deliver by 2024 an expanded Social Sciences Week program exceeding 200 national events and a national schools program engaging at least 50 teachers and classrooms across the country as well creating an online educational Community of Practice to grow capacity in social sciences teaching.

3. Deepen ties with the Asia-Pacific by investing in social science research exchange and collaboration

Australia urgently needs a renewed financial and leadership investment in diplomatic ties with its neighbours and allies in the Asia-Pacific region. This includes deepening social and cultural connections through active researcher exchange and collaboration.

[The Association of Asian Social Science Research Councils](#) (AASSREC) is an organisation of national social science research councils, academies, and institutes committed to the promotion of regional cooperation in the field of social sciences. AASSREC is a full member of the International Science Council and comprises of members from 14 Asia-Pacific nations, including India, Japan, China, and Indonesia. This Association has been supported and managed since the early 2000s by the Academy.

AASSREC intends to grow its activities to include a national mentoring program for early career scholars in developing Asian nations and a much-needed social science journal directory for the Asia-Pacific region. **The Academy recommends the government consider a strategic investment of \$100,00 p/a to support AASSREC's capacity to:**

- expand of the mentoring program to include 50 early-career scholars per annum in countries including Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and other countries
- establish an AASSREC research exchange program to promote research collaboration and capacity building between Australia and regional social science researchers and organisations
- expand secretariat support, including for the Association's biennial Symposium that brings together research agencies, councils, students and NGOs from across the Asia-Pacific region.

4. Implement a strategic research agenda to support Australia's transition to a low emissions economy

Australia's transition to a low emissions economy is a massive and complex task. In addition to implementing sensible climate change policy, the Academy strongly recommends that the Australian Government consider implementing and investing in a cohesive and strategic research agenda that will enable a successful energy transition.

Science and technology have shown us the causes, consequences and risks of climate change, and they have a critical role in developing needed technologies to reduce emissions and manage harms in the future. Many of key challenges at present, however, are social and relate to policy, regulation, community engagement and governance.

Research investment across a broad range of disciplines will help Australia stay ahead of the curve, minimise risks to our economy and community, and harness opportunities to grow our energy export market. Yet, Australia's energy R&D expenditure is low relative to other key economies and has been declining since 2004.

The Academy recommends the Australian Government implement the [Australian Energy Research Plan](#) developed by the Australian Council of Learned Academies (ACOLA). The Australian Energy Transition Research Plan outlines a roadmap for the urgent, cross-cutting research required to best support Australia through the transition to a green energy economy.

5. Develop and invest in a coordinated whole-of-government way to deal with mental health issues

The prevalence of mental health conditions has increased in recent years, and their management has become more complex. Exacerbating events include climate change and natural disasters, the COVID-19 pandemic and disruptions to home, school, and work, as well as increased domestic violence, alcohol and substance use, the negative effects of social media and the increased prevalence of financial scams.

The management of mental health issues has been impeded by the costs of delivery, availability of qualified professionals, difficulties in extending target programs outside capital cities, and the continuing stigma of seeking assistance for mental health issues. Added to disagreements over Federal and State government responsibilities and resources, mental health services are approaching crisis in Australia.

The Academy recommends a broad review of Australia's mental health system as well as immediate and substantive financial investment in mental health management and support programs in target areas, including but not limited to young people whose lives have been disrupted significantly in recent years.